

DAREDEVIL[®]

THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!

ASCENT
TO
MYSTERY



© 1995

And Williams

HE REMEMBERS FEELING
ALIVE-- IN A WAY HE
NEVER HAD BEFORE.



THE CITY WAS ALIVE, TOO; HE
COULD HEAR EVERY NIGHT-SIGH,
EVERY BELLOW OF RAGE, EVERY
DESPERATE CRY OF HOPE.



CATCH THE SCENT OF AN
INSOMNIAC'S THREE A.M.,
CIGARETTE, OF POOLING
BLOOD, OF SHEDDING TEARS

...CAPTURED THE
NIGHT IN THE PALM
OF HIS HAND.



ALL OF IT--THE PAIN
AND THE JOY, THE TER-
RORS AND THE TRIUMPHS--
WASHING OVER HIM AS
HE SUCKED IN HIS
BREATH, MADE THE LEAP...



BUT NO MATTER HOW
HIGH HE LEAPED, HOW
FAR HE WENT, HIS
TEACHER PUSHED
HIM HIGHER, FARTHER.



JUST WHEN HE'D REACH HIS
LIMIT, WHEN HE'D BE SO
EXHAUSTED HE COULDN'T
TAKE ANOTHER STEP, STICK
WOULD GRAB HIM BY THE
COLLAR, YANK HIM TO
HIS FEET...

"...AND DRAG
HIM TO THE
EDGE."

"YOU HAVE THE
COURAGE, KID?"
HE'D ASK, IN THAT
VOICE LIKE SPIT
AND GRAVEL.

"CAN YOU TAKE
THE DARE?"



"CAN YOU,
MATT?"

MATT?

HEY, KID--

--DIDN'T Y'HEAR WHAT I
SAID? GET UP--

--SO I CAN KNOCK YOU FLAT ON
YOUR STUPID BUTT AGAIN!

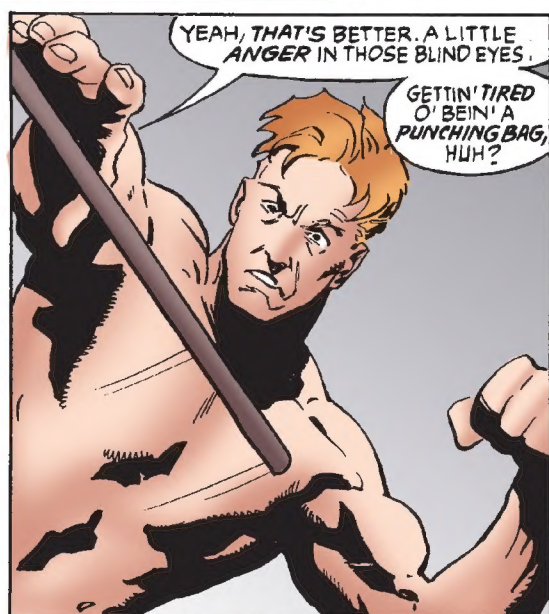
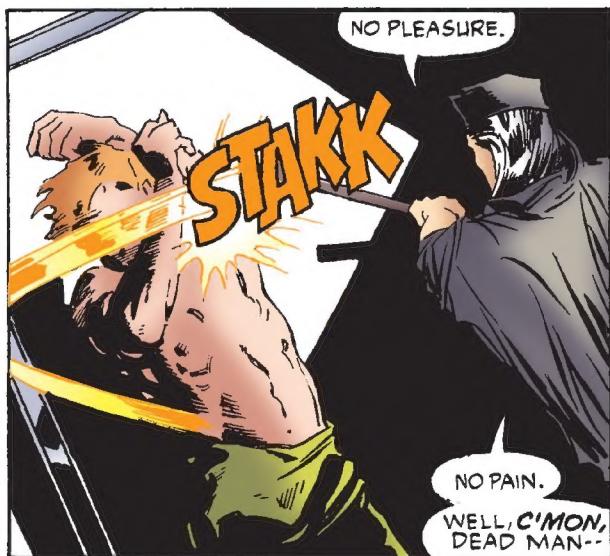
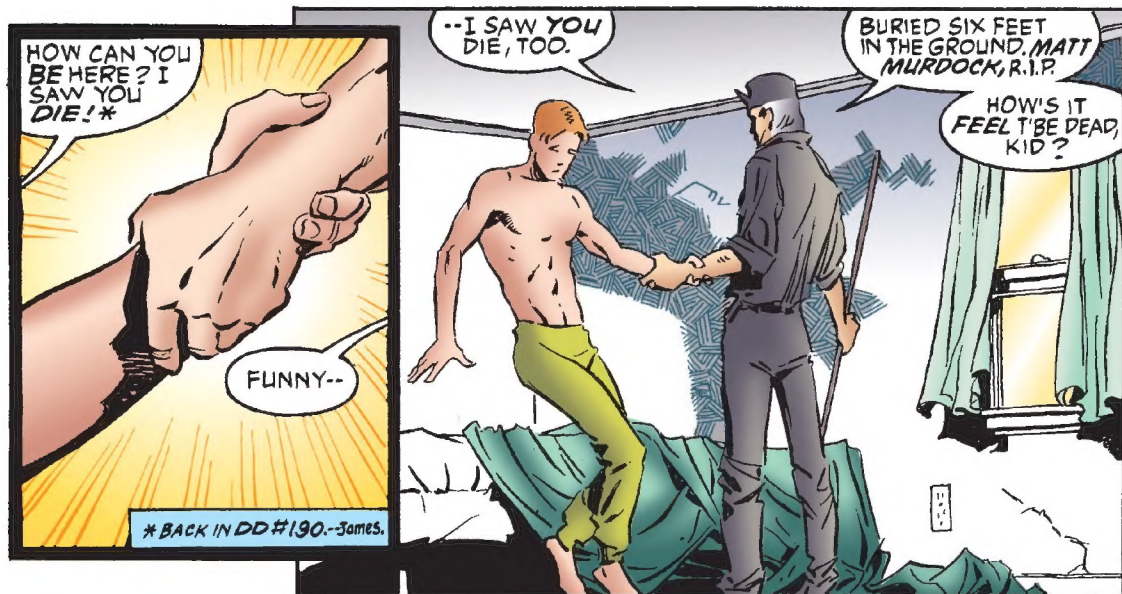
STAN LEE
PRESENTS

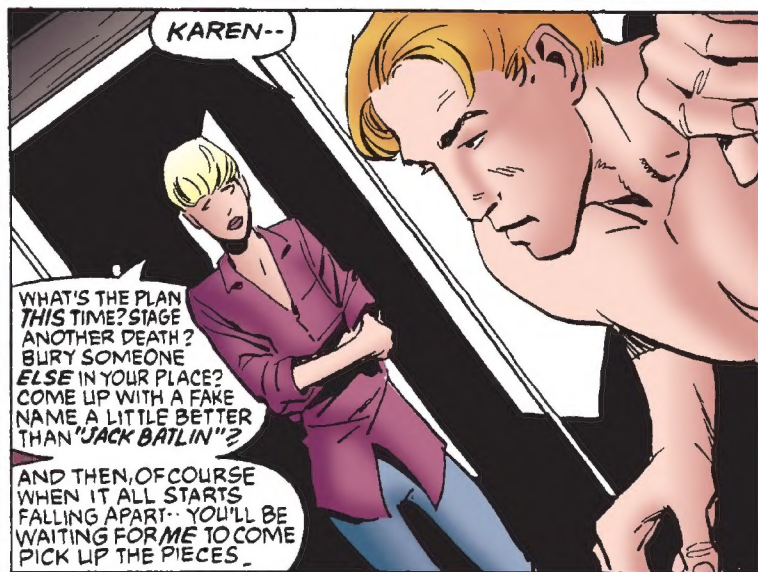
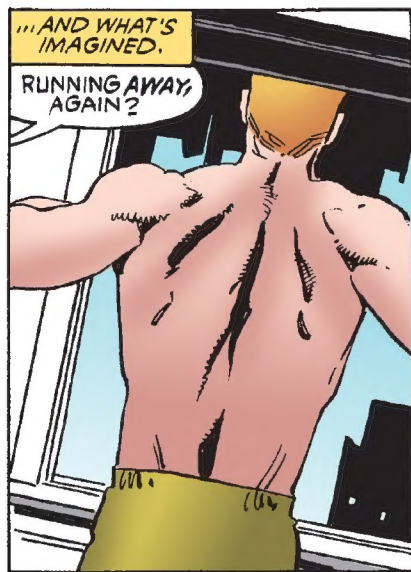
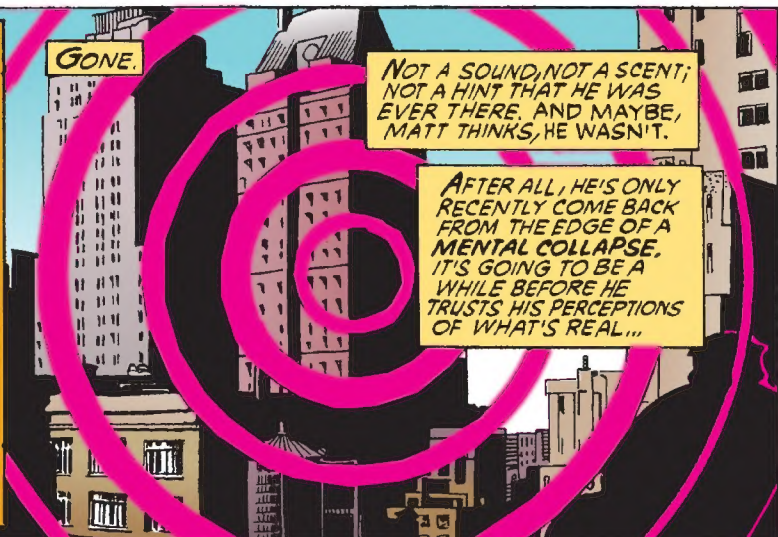
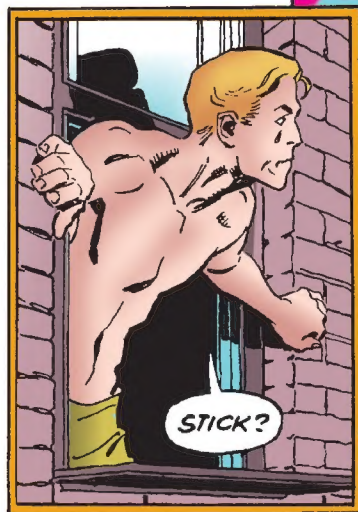
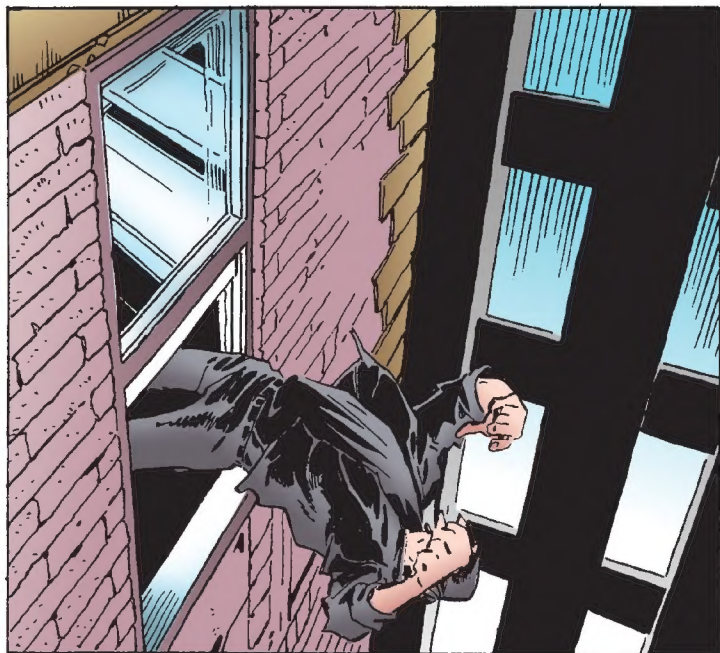
DAREDEVIL IN PARADISO

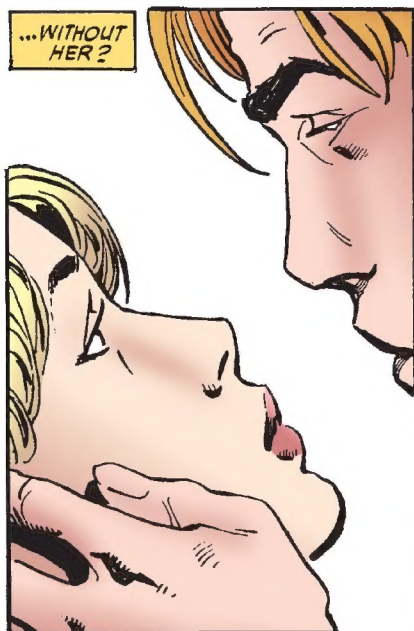
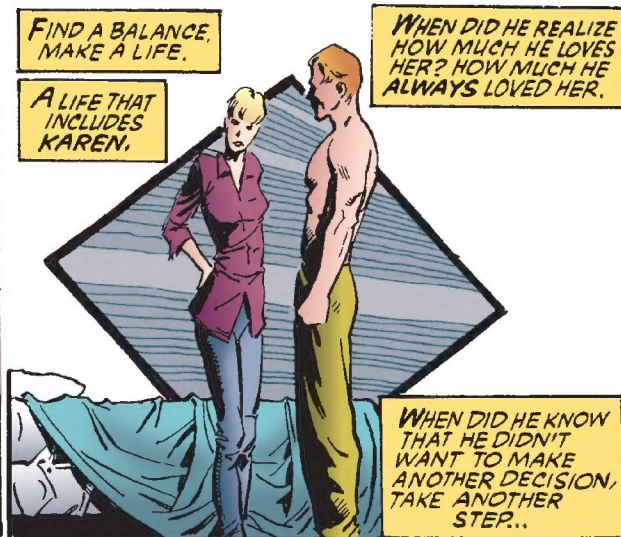
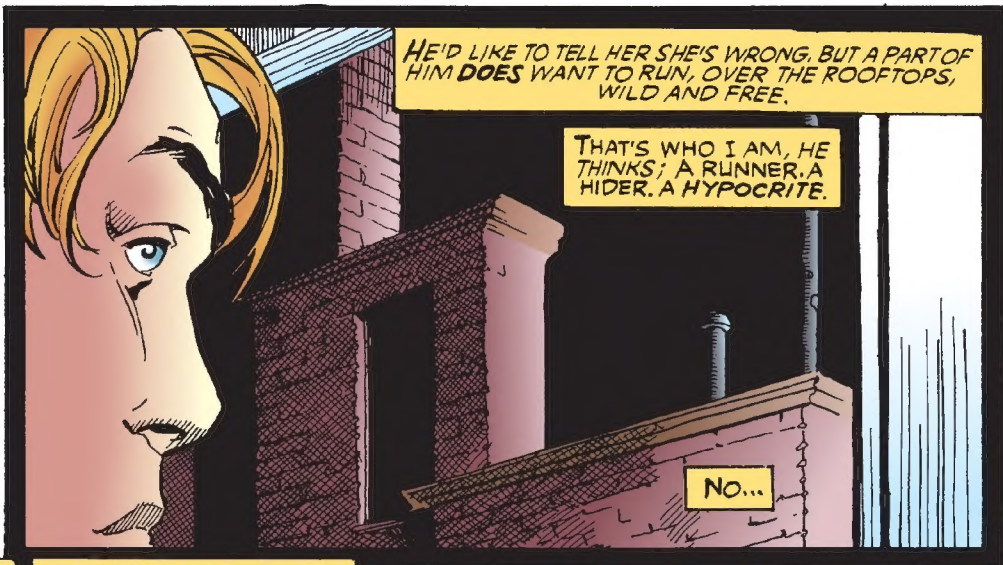
PART ONE

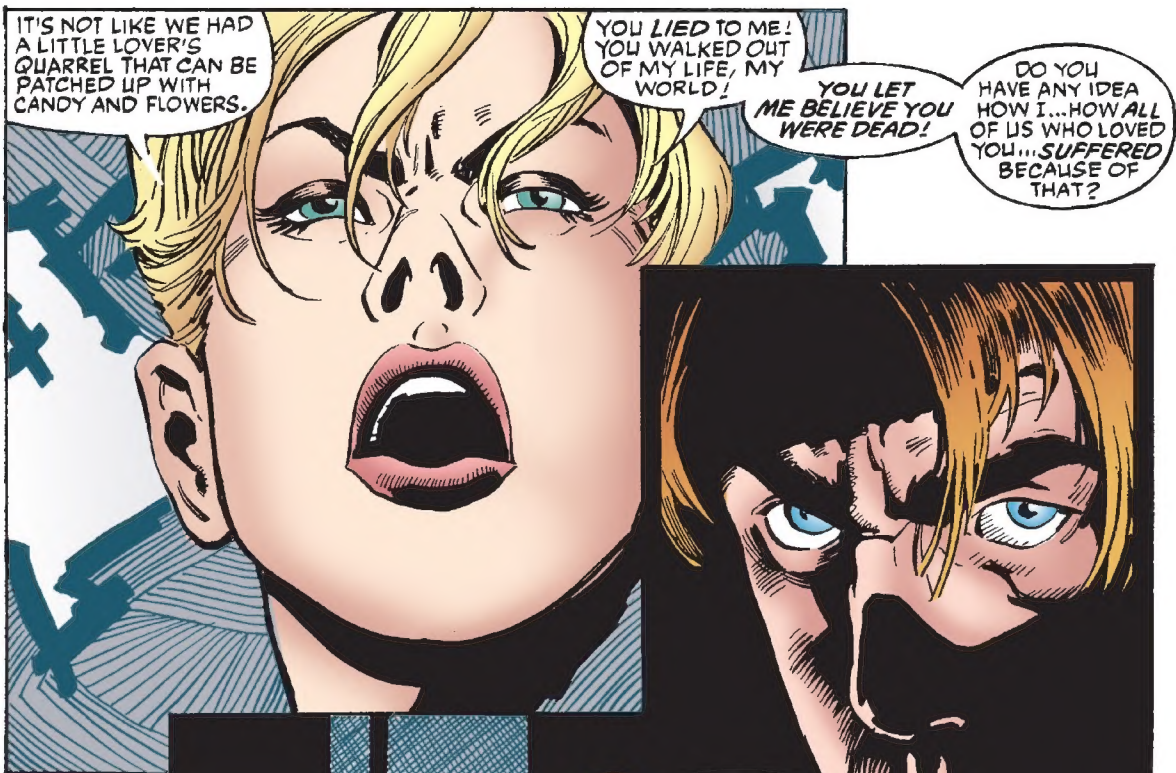
STICK?

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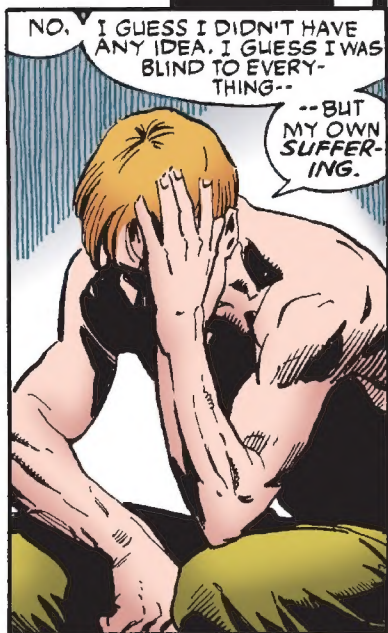
IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAD A LITTLE LOVER'S QUARREL THAT CAN BE PATCHED UP WITH CANDY AND FLOWERS.

YOU LIED TO ME! YOU WALKED OUT OF MY LIFE, MY WORLD!

YOU LET ME BELIEVE YOU WERE DEAD!

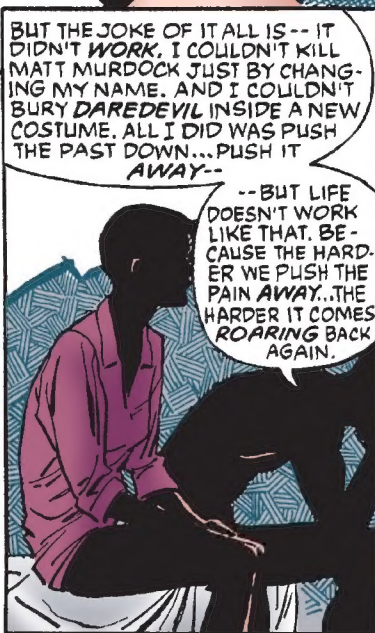
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW I...HOW ALL OF US WHO LOVED YOU...SUFFERED BECAUSE OF THAT?

HOW DARE YOU JUDGE ME? HOW--



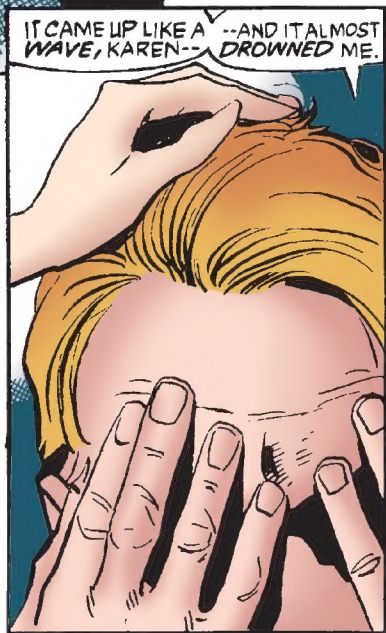
NO. I GUESS I DIDN'T HAVE ANY IDEA. I GUESS I WAS BLIND TO EVERYTHING--

--BUT MY OWN SUFFERING.

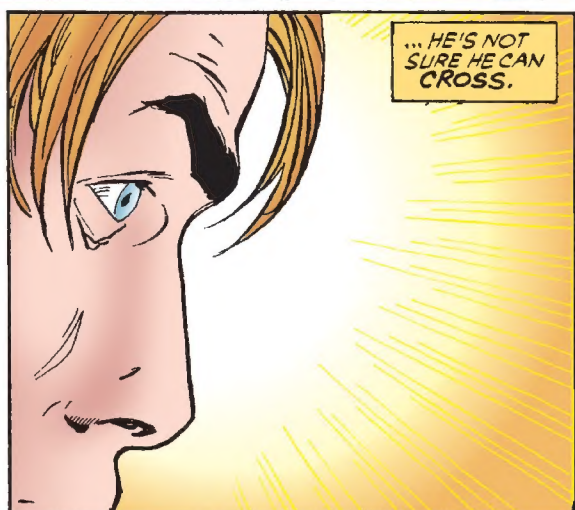
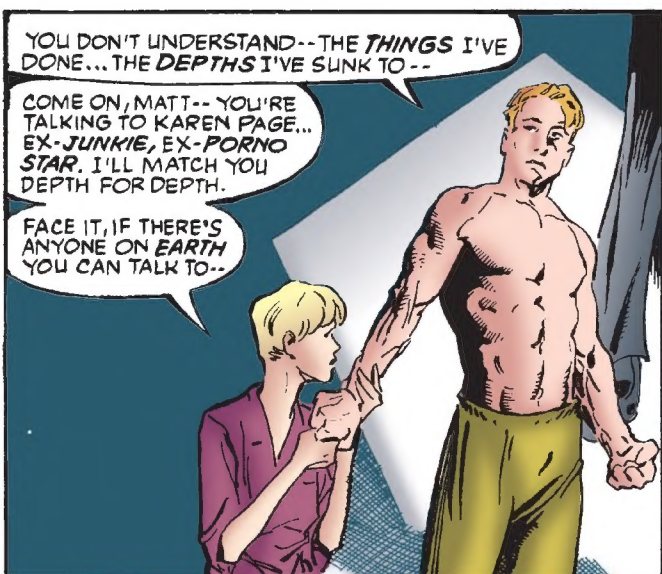
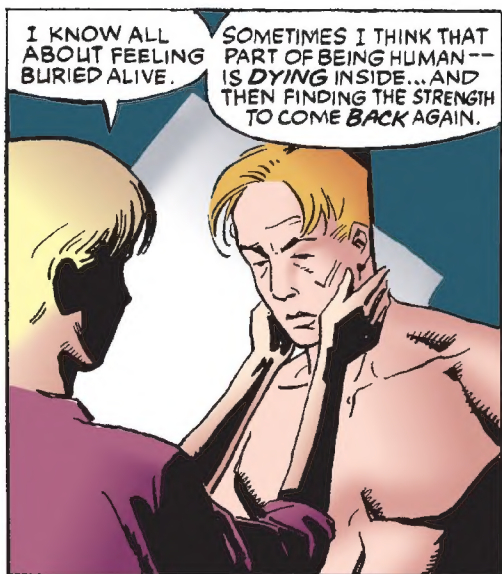


BUT THE JOKE OF IT ALL IS-- IT DIDN'T WORK. I COULDN'T KILL MATT MURDOCK JUST BY CHANGING MY NAME. AND I COULDN'T BURY DAREDEVIL INSIDE A NEW COSTUME. ALL I DID WAS PUSH THE PAST DOWN...PUSH IT AWAY--

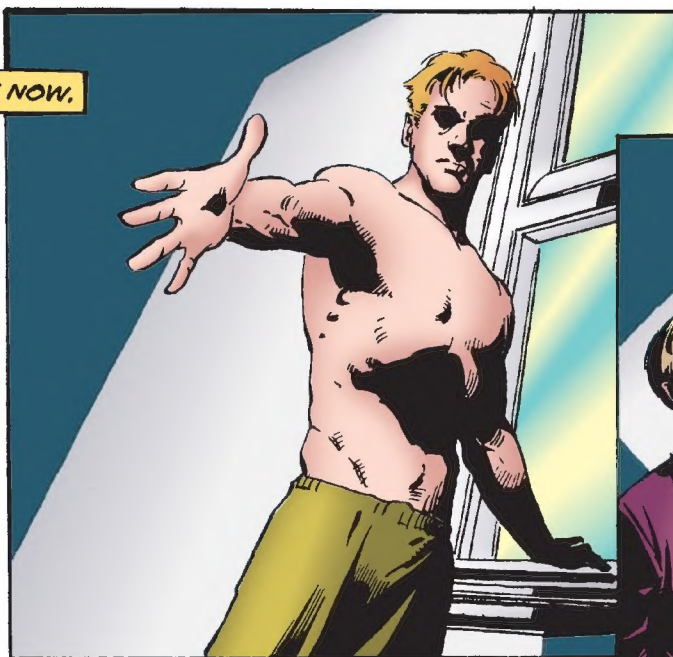
--BUT LIFE DOESN'T WORK LIKE THAT. BECAUSE THE HARDER WE PUSH THE PAIN AWAY...THE HARDER IT COMES ROARING BACK AGAIN.



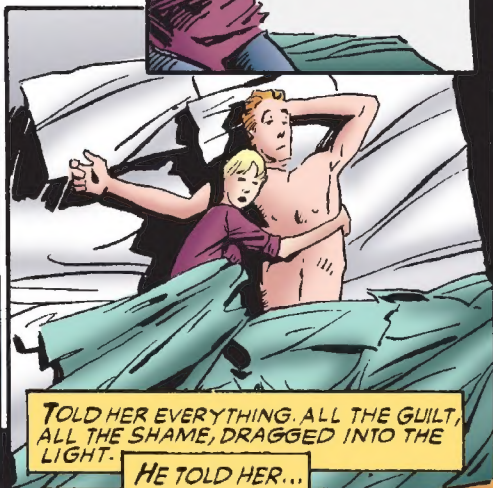
IT CAME UP LIKE A WAVE, KAREN-- --AND IT ALMOST DROWNED ME.



NOT NOW.



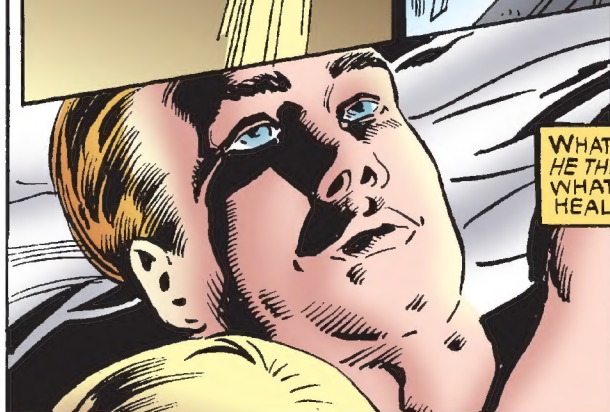
HE DID IT.



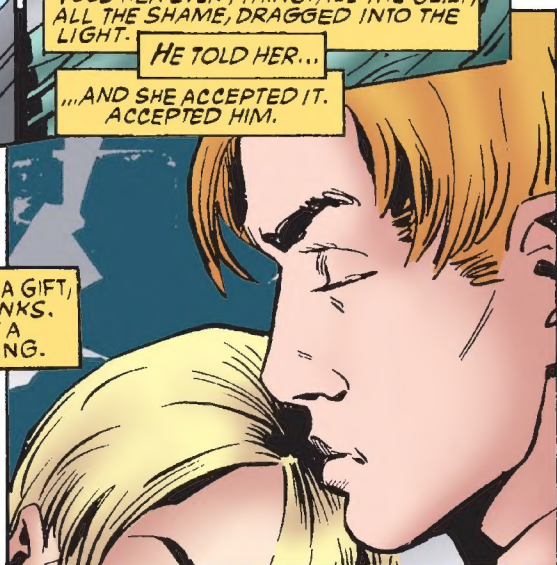
TOLD HER EVERYTHING. ALL THE GUILT, ALL THE SHAME, DRAGGED INTO THE LIGHT.

HE TOLD HER...

...AND SHE ACCEPTED IT. ACCEPTED HIM.



WHAT A GIFT, HE THINKS. WHAT A HEALING.



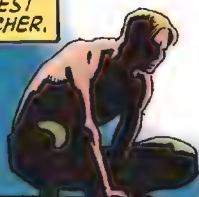
HE EVEN FOUND THE COURAGE TO CONFESS HIS DARKEST GUILT, HIS DEEPEST SHAME: THE PROSTITUTE... THE GIRL... WHO DIED SO LONG AGO. WHO HE-- HOWEVER INADVERTENTLY-- KILLED. AND KAREN ACCEPTED HIM.

BUT THIS, MATT REALIZES, IS JUST THE FIRST STEP. IT'S WONDERFUL, SAFE AND WARM, HERE IN KAREN'S ARMS, IN KAREN'S BED. BUT HIS ANSWER, HIS EXPIATION...

...IS OUT
THERE.

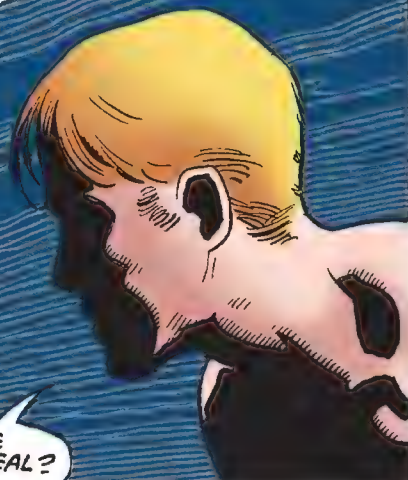


HE CASTS HIS
HYPER-SENSES
OUT LIKE A NET
ACROSS THE CITY--
SIFTING THROUGH
SCENTS AND SOUNDS
FOR THE SMALLEST
HINT OF HIS TEACHER.



STICK!

ARE YOU
THERE?



ARE
YOU REAL?

BUT HOW, HE MUSES,
DO I FIND ONE OF
THE CHASTE? HOW
DO I TRACK A MYSTIC
WARRIOR WHO WAS
DANCING THROUGH
SHADOWS BEFORE
I WAS BORN?

ANSWER ME,
DAMMIT! ANSWER--

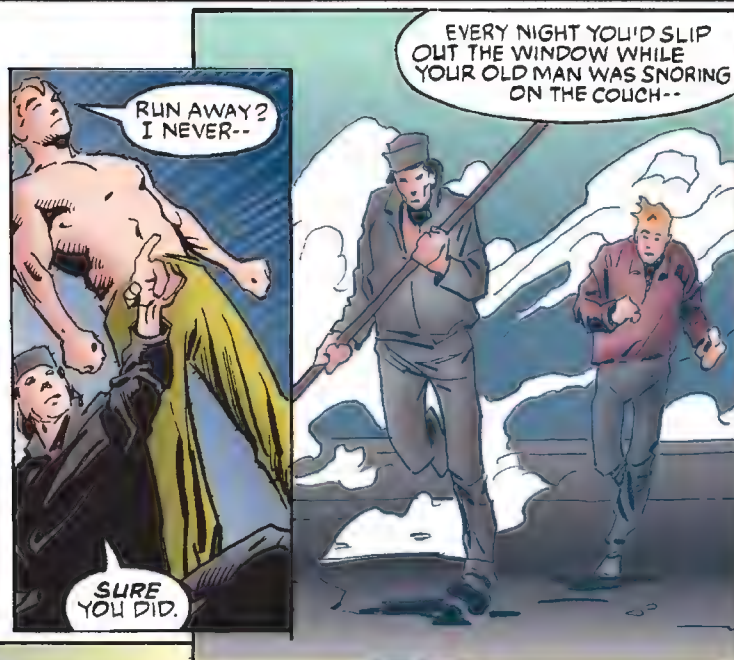
BOO.

.. ME.

HEY--DON'T
TELL ME I SCARED
"THE MAN WITH-
OUT FEAR."

NOT
SCARED. JUST...
STARTLED.

Y'NEVER COULD
ADMIT IT WHEN YOU WERE
AFRAID, COULD YOU? IT'S
NOTHING T'BE ASHAMED OF,
Y'KNOW. I'D BE, TOO--





SHEDDING HIM--
AND EVERYONE AND
EVERYTHING IN HIS
LIFE-- LIKE A SNAKE-
SKIN.

YOU WERE
BURYING MURDOCK
YEARS BEFORE "JACK
BATLIN" CAME
ALONG.

BUT
Y'KNOW WHAT,
EINSTEIN?

YOU
HAD IT ALL
WRONG.



I WASN'T TRY-
ING TO TAKE YOU AWAY
FROM MURDOCK.



I WAS TRYING TO DRAG YOU TO HIM.

I WAS TRY-
ING TO MAKE
YOU A MAN.

YOU DIDN'T GET
IT THEN. THINK I CAN
POUND IT INTO THAT
THICK HEAD NOW?

IT'S YOUR
CALL, COUNSELOR. YOU
WANNA STAY DOWN IN
THAT GRAVE--



--OR
CLIMB UP TO
HEAVEN?



MATT FOLLOWS: EXHILARATED
AND, YES, AFRAID.

STICK WAS
RIGHT, OF
COURSE. HE'S
NEVER BEEN
ONE TO ADMIT
HIS FEARS.

HE TOOK THE LABEL THE
NEWSPAPERS GAVE
HIM TOO MUCH TO
HEART. "THE MAN
WITHOUT FEAR."
IT WAS ALWAYS A
BADGE OF PRIDE.

BUT TO HAVE NO
FEAR, HE SUDDEN-
LY SEES, IS TO BE
DEAD INSIDE, OR
CRAZY. OR BOTH.

NO. THE TRICK
IS TO LOOK
YOUR FEAR
SQUARE IN
THE EYES...

...AND KEEP
GOING.


THE FLATIRON
BUILDING IS NO
SKYSCRAPER.
YET IT LOOMS
ABOVE HIM,
TALLER THAN
THE TWIN
TOWERS.

WHATEVER
THE CASE...


...HE'S GOT TO
MAKE THE LEAP...

...TAKE THE
DARE!

WHICH EITHER MEANS HIS HYPER-SENSES
HAVE GONE CRAZY-- OR STICK IS PLAY-
ING MIND GAMES WITH HIM.




Y'WANNA GET OUT
OF THE GRAVE, KID...
YOU GOTTA **CLIMB**
LIKE YOU NEVER
CLIMBED BEFORE.




YOU GOTTA
SWEAT AND CLAW,
STRUGGLE AND
BLEED, IF YOU'RE
GONNA MAKE IT
INTO--


--HEAVEN.




HEAVEN?
AN ICY
HELL IS
MORE
LIKE IT.




MATT KNOWS THIS
ISN'T REAL: IT CAN'T
BE. AND YET, PARA-
DOXICALLY, HE FEELS,
TO THE BOTTOM OF
HIS SOUL, THAT HE'S
REALLY THERE,
ACROSS THE WORLD...



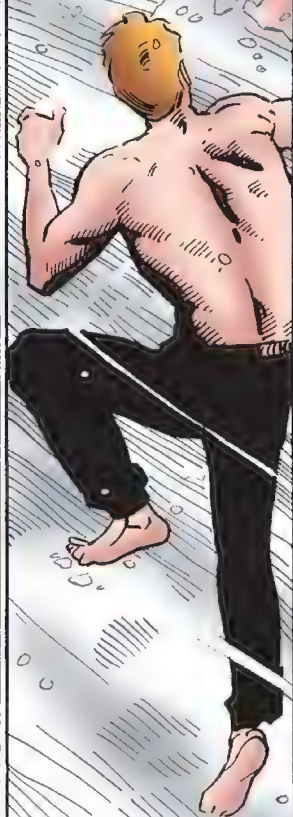
FEELS, TOO, THAT
WITH EACH CAREFUL
STEP, HE'S CLIMBING
THE HEIGHTS OF
HIS OWN SOUL.



THE WIND IS
BRUTALLY NUMBING,
THE AIR BITTER COLD.
HIS FINGERS DIG
DEEP INTO CRUST-
ED SNOW.



...ON THE FABLED
MOUNTAIN THAT
LEADS TO THE
CHASTE'S HIDDEN
RETREAT.



HEIGHTS THAT HAVE BEEN
DENIED HIM NOT BY FATE...

...BUT BY HIS
OWN NATURE.

EVEN AS A GUST OF WIND CARRIES
HIM AWAY, EVEN AS HE STRUGGLES
NOT TO FALL TO DEPTHS REAL OR
IMAGINED...

...HE SEES HIMSELF
WITH NEW EYES:

OTHER MEN, MATT REALIZES, MAY HAVE
INSTINCTS THAT DRIVE THEM TO DECENCY.
NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU PUSH THEM,
THEY'LL INEVITABLY--ALMOST UN-
CONSCIOUSLY--DO THE RIGHT THING.

CLING TO
THE GOOD.

BUT HIS OWN INSTINCT
HAS ALWAYS BEEN
FAR MORE... RECKLESS.

HE'S ALWAYS LOVED
THE LEAP, THE DARE,
THE DEVIL IN THE
DARKNESS

HE'S HAD TO STRUGGLE AGAINST HIS
NATURE TO REACH FOR THE HIGHER GROUND.

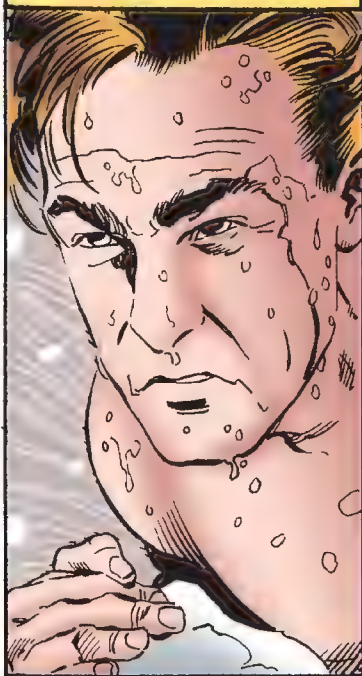
...THAT'S WHAT MAKES
A HERO.

AND MAYBE, HE
THINKS, JUST MAYBE...

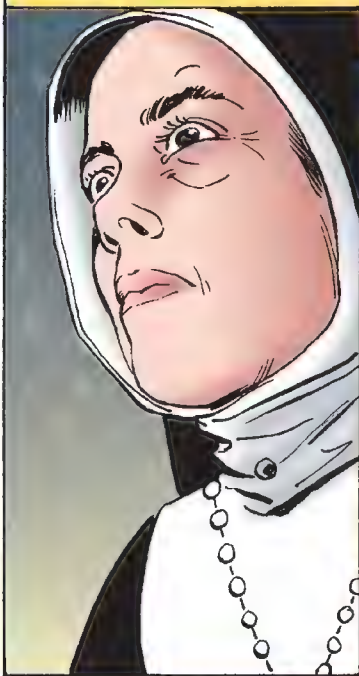
NOT THE SELFLESS
ACT OF A SELFLESS
MAN; BUT THE SELF-
LESS ACT OF A
SELFISH MAN.

A MAN WHO
LOVES THE FALL...

...BUT CHOOSES THE CLIMB, NONETHELESS.



HE GREW UP HERE, SISTER MAGGIE THINKS...



...WITHOUT ME.

SHE WAS NEVER FAR AWAY; BUT THE TRUTH IS SHE WAS NEVER CLOSE ENOUGH, EITHER.

HIS FATHER TRIED-- MORE THAN MOST MEN WOULD EVER TRY-- TO HELP MATT. TO LIFT HIM UP, ABOVE THE STINK AND VIOLENCE OF THESE HELL'S KITCHEN STREETS.



BUT JACK MURDOCK WAS A MAN STRUGGLING MIGHTILY WITH HIS OWN DEMONS. HOW DO YOU RAISE ANOTHER SOUL OUT OF HELL, SHE THINKS, WHEN YOU'RE TRAPPED THERE YOURSELF?



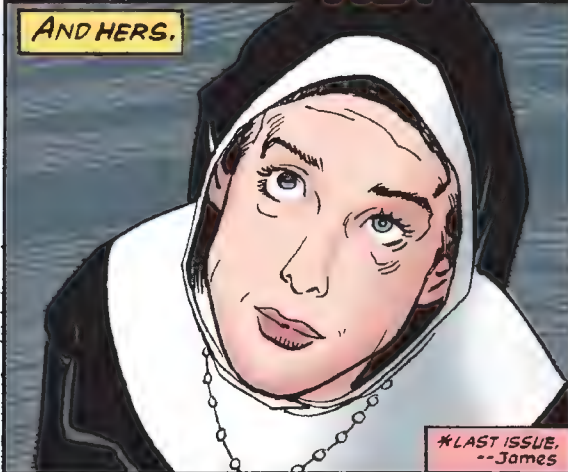
NO, MATT STRUGGLED ALONE. HIS TRIUMPHS WERE HIS OWN.

AND HIS FAILURES?



THEY WERE JACK'S.

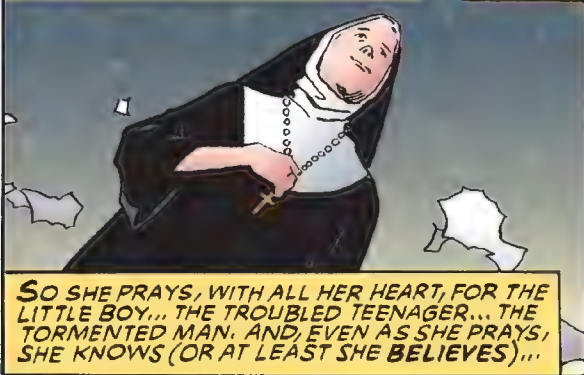
AND HERS.



*LAST ISSUE, --James

NOW, AS SHE TOLD MATT WHEN HE CAME TO HER IN THE CHURCH*-- HE'S BEYOND HER HELP.

BUT NOT BEYOND GOD'S.



SO SHE PRAYS, WITH ALL HER HEART, FOR THE LITTLE BOY... THE TROUBLED TEENAGER... THE TORMENTED MAN. AND, EVEN AS SHE PRAYS, SHE KNOWS (OR AT LEAST SHE BELIEVES)...

...THAT HE'LL BEST
HIS DEMONS.



CLIMB HIS
MOUNTAINS.

FIND GRACE.



KAREN
PAGE
SHOULD
BE
ANGRY...

...BUT
SHE'S
NOT.

SHE KNOWS HE'S
COMING BACK. NOT
JUST BECAUSE HE
TOLD HER IN HIS NOTE...

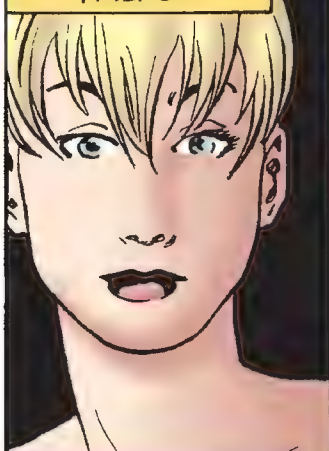
...BUT BECAUSE HE TOLD
HER WITH HIS LOVE, WITH
EVERY GENTLE TOUCH,
EVERY SWEET MOVEMENT
OF HIS BODY.

HE'S COMING
BACK...



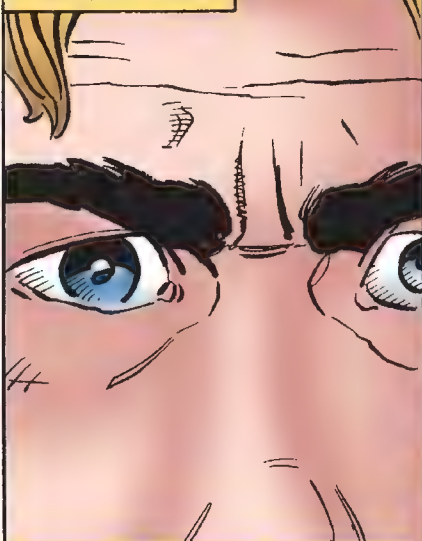
...NOT AS THE CONQUERING HERO--
BUT AS HER PARTNER, HER EQUAL,
HER DEAREST LOVER...

...AND HER DEAREST
FRIEND.



SHE CAN'T SAY WHY--BUT
SHE BELIEVES IN HIM. IN
THEM. SHE CAN'T SAY
WHY--BUT FOR THE FIRST
TIME IN TOO MANY HARD
AND LONELY YEARS...

...SHE HAS HOPE,



HOW COME I'M NOT LAUGHING?
FOGGY NELSON THINKS.

WHenever HE'S FEELING REST-
LESS OR BORED, DEPRESSED
OR ANXIOUS, HE'S GOT A
SURE-FIRE CURE!



A BOWL OF MICROWAVED POP-
CORN AND A VIDEO OF "DUCK
SOUP." BUT, TONIGHT,
"HAIL, HAIL FREDONIA" ISN'T
WORKING ITS MAGIC.

HE CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT MATT. HIS BEST FRIEND.

A BEST FRIEND WHO LIED TO FOGGY. DECEIVED HIM.

HE STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT! MATT WAS DAREDEVIL... IS DAREDEVIL!

WHY COULDN'T MATT TELL HIM? TRUST HIM? HE CERTAINLY HAD NO PROBLEM TELLING KAREN THE TRUTH!

WHAT KIND OF FRIEND LIVES A LIE LIKE THAT-- TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY? FOR THAT MATTER...

... WHAT KIND OF FRIEND LETS THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE HIM BELIEVE HE'S DEAD? LETS THEIR HEARTS BREAK?

LETS THEM MOURN?

SO MANY YEARS TOGETHER! BUSINESS PARTNERS, BUDDIES. FAMILY. SO MANY YEARS-- AND YOU THINK YOU KNOW A PERSON.

WHEN ALL YOU REALLY KNOW...



... IS A MASK.

HE'S STARTING TO LOSE THE FEELING IN HIS HANDS.

BUT MATT MURDOCK KEEPS CLIMBING...

... AND HE WON'T STOP...

HIS LUNGS ARE BURNING FROM THE COLD.

... UNTIL HE REACHES...

...THE SUMMIT.

WHAT THE
DEVIL IS GOING
ON HERE?!

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE
MOUNTAIN?

WHAT
MOUNTAIN?

STOP
PLAYING GAMES
WITH ME,
STICK!

LIFE'S A GAME,
KID. AN' YOU'VE GOTTA
DETACH YOURSELF
FROM ALL YOUR PRE-
CONCEPTIONS IN ORDER
T'PLAY IT RIGHT.

SPARE ME YOUR
ZEN SMOKESCREENS,
WILL YOU?

I WANT
ANSWERS--

--AND I
WANT THEM NOW!

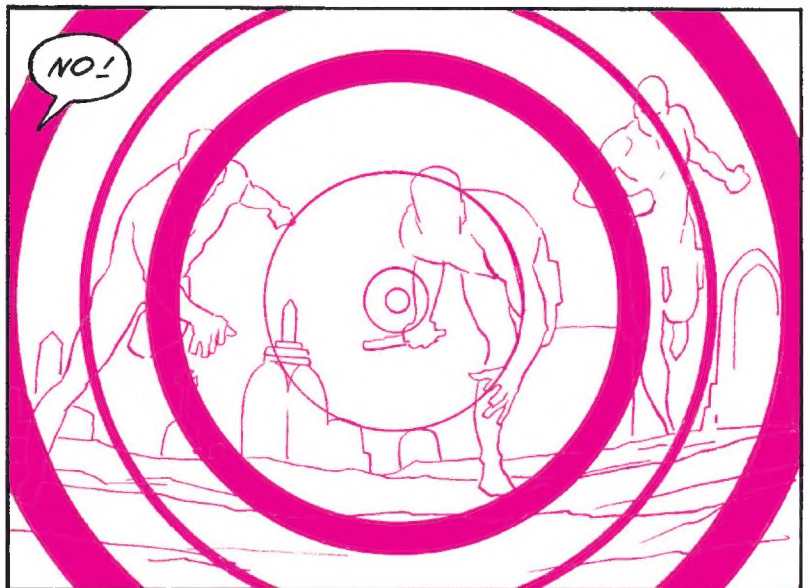
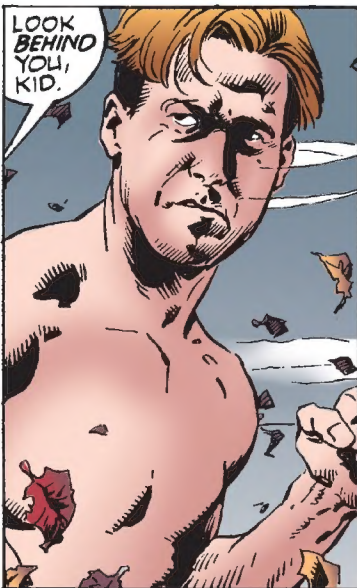
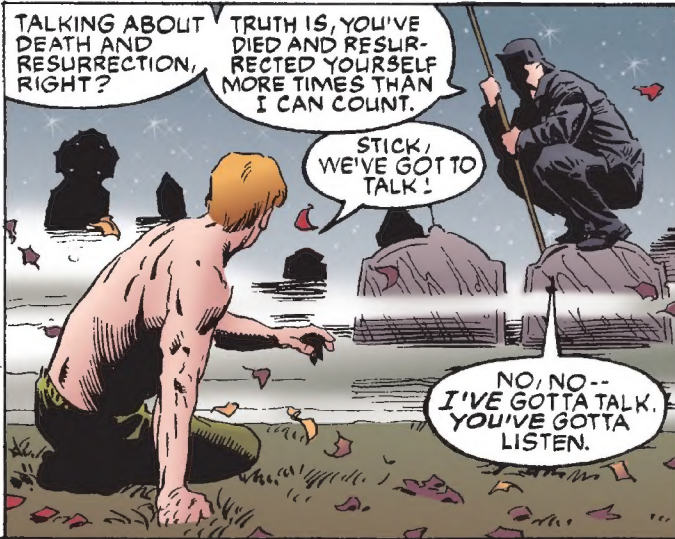
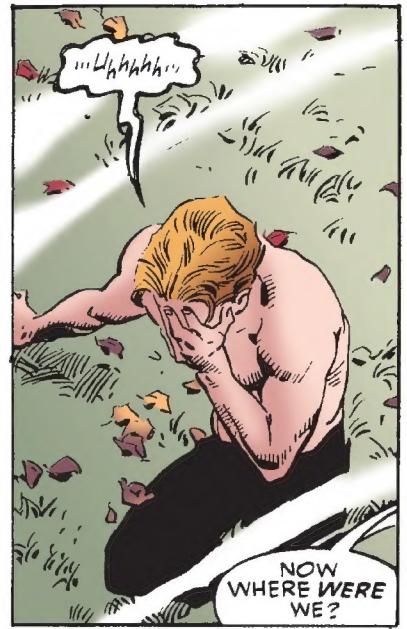
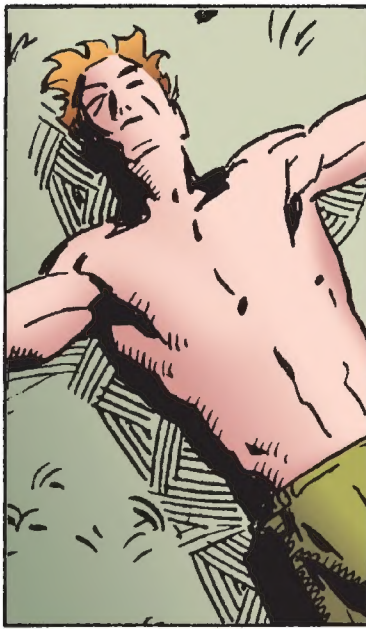
ANSWERS?
UH-UH.

Tepp

WE'RE
NOT NEARLY
DONE WITH THE
QUESTIONS.

SAY GOODNIGHT,
GRACIE.

SKRAK



THIS
IS
IMPOSSIBLE!

MAYBE IT IS. BUT
THAT'S NOT GONNA STOP
THOSE THREE...
IMPOSSIBILITIES...

--FROM
TAKING YOU
APART!

NEXT: PURGATORIO

CONCLUDES--AND RON WAGNER
RETURNS--IN A DOUBLE-SIZED
SHOCKER THAT WILL CHANGE
THE COURSE OF D.D. HISTORY!
BE HERE FOR **DAREDEVIL**
#350 IN THIRTY DAYS!